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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 PORT AU PRINCE 001439

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/EX, WHA/CAR AND S/CRS  
WHA/EX PASS USOAS  
SOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD  
NSC FOR FISK  
STATE PASS AID FOR LAC/CAR AND OMA

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [EAID](#) [PREL](#) [HA](#)  
SUBJECT: CITE SOLEIL - REPOSITIONING A HAITIAN ICON

REF: A. PORT AU PRINCE 583  
[1](#)B. PORT AU PRINCE 1307  
[1](#)C. PORT AU PRINCE 1317

[1](#)1. (U) This message is sensitive but unclassified )  
please protect accordingly.

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Summary  
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2 (U) Cite Soleil, historically the most volatile zone in Port-au-Prince and a base for crime on a nationally destabilizing scale appears to have lost some of its explosive social potential. Two recent social and natural disasters here underlined this change. USG efforts through the Haiti Stabilization Initiative (HSI) have been a significant factor in moving Cite Soleil towards a degree of normalcy. However, Cite Soleil now shares in the trials of Haiti as the country enters into a difficult period in the wake of tropical storms Fay, Gustav, Hanna and Ike.

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Background  
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[1](#)3. (U) Over the last decade, Cite Soleil, a bitterly poor slum of 300,000 inhabitants became the icon of Haiti's dysfunctionality and lawlessness. Heavily armed gangs took control of the slum after attacking and overrunning police stations in Cite Soleil with the population's support in [1](#)2004. During 2005 and 2006 they drove the institutions of the Haitian state from the urban third of the commune ) the Town of Cite Soleil ) and used it as a base for criminal forays, particularly for kidnapping, an activity that became so prevalent that by the end of 2006 it was having an impact on the whole country. The Brazilian Battalion (BraBatt) of MINUSTAH took Cite Soleil back in a series of sharp urban firefights between December 2006 and February 2007.

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Changes  
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[1](#)4. (U) Cite Soleil maintains the image of one of the most dangerous and violent quarters of metropolitan Port-au-Prince along with the Martissant/Cite Eternel neighborhoods south of downtown. However, there is evidence that the old image of Cite Soleil is becoming, or has become,

obsolete. Over the last year economic activity in Cite Soleil has grown to the point where Avenue Soleil is a busy thoroughfare. During the food riots which rocked Haiti in April of 2008 (Ref A), Cite Soleil remained calm and free of violence. Work on USG-funded projects continued in Cite Soleil, while most of the Port-au-Prince area shut down. A UN Civilian Police Officer was killed in downtown Port-au-Prince, an attack made on the Haitian Coast Guard near Martissant, and access to the south of the country was blocked by barricades of burning tires. By contrast the main artery to the north of the country which abuts Cite Soleil remained unobstructed the entire week. While some citizens of Cite Soleil joined the demonstrations against high food prices in other parts of Port-au-Prince, they did so as individuals, and not as organized or spontaneous groups.

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Causes - Why was Cite Soleil different?  
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15. (U) As Cite Soleil is the impact area for a major USG experiment in civilian-led stabilization, the Haiti Stabilization Initiative (HSI), some investigation of these circumstances seemed in order. One aspect is the continued presence and activity of MINUSTAH's BraBatt, which patrols Cite Soleil and is a visible guarantor of civil order. There is now a small contingent of thirty six HNP officers assigned. They are well respected by the population, but the small number of HNP makes it difficult to claim that this unit made the decisive difference. Some, including a prominent businessman and the chief justice of the peace for

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Cite Soleil, gave credit to HSI. At the time of the April unrest, approximately 5.5 million of the USD 20 million HSI budget had actually reached the ground, in the form of completed or ongoing projects in community building and small infrastructure projects, a large road project, and smaller vocational training and justice sector projects. These efforts have improved the living conditions of a large number of Cite Soleil residents while providing temporary employment. More importantly, the projects had supported a cadre of local community leaders with grassroots support who were not interested in joining the riots and demolishing the town, unlike the gangs that participated in other places. Ongoing projects in Cite Soleil continued through the week uninterrupted while much of the rest of Port-au-Prince came to a standstill.

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Continued Progress  
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16. (U) Since that time, the atmosphere in Cite Soleil continues to be positive, albeit with continued crime and poverty. One major road project has been completed, and another is in the final stages of launching. The road project and a number of smaller street and drainage projects under the community building segment of HSI have materially improved living conditions and critical drainage. During the recent tropical storms which devastated low-lying areas all over Haiti, rumors circulated that Cite Soleil was under water. In reality the Town of Cite Soleil was undamaged. When a similar disaster occurred in 2007, 4,000 angry displaced people camped out around the Mayor's office, who, in turn, shot his way out of the crowd. This year, Cite Soleil suffered from the same amount of rain but no social unrest. In the last month, there have been two shooting deaths at the gateway to Cite Soleil, one of a uniformed police officer, though it appears in that case the motives were purely personal. While such violence is disturbing, the cases do provide some further evidence of improvement. In 2006 the killers would have been acting with complete impunity. In the present day cases the HNP acted decisively, investigated the crimes, and in both cases now have suspects in custody. They now have the support of the community in

these investigations, highlighted by the fact that one suspect in the shooting of the policeman was turned in by his own father.

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Governance  
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17. (U) In the last few months the ability of the Mayor, Wilson Louis (the first elected leader of this newly created commune) and his team to lead this community appears to be improving. The elected leaders of Cite Soleil were held in extraordinarily low esteem in an HSI-funded survey in November 2007, with an approval rating of eight percent. Mayor Louis succeeded in moving a large, reluctant and vocal community of small merchants to a new HSI-funded market without the use of overwhelming force or provoking unrest or violence. In contrast, the mayor of upper class Petion-Ville had to use force to move street vendors into a new market. This change may be assisted by the recent ramping up of HSI's strategic communications segment, where a great deal of effort has been put into the cultivation of Haitian journalists of all media (radio to explain HSI to Cite Soleil, print to explain HSI to the middle and upper classes of Haiti).

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Conclusion and Comment  
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18. (U) Progress in Cite Soleil is palpable. HSI and other efforts have gone a long way to making Cite Soleil a peaceful, albeit poor neighborhood. It is no longer the destabilizing enclave that it was in 2006. The reaction to social or natural disasters is no longer as bitter or violent. There seems to be greater civility on all sides.

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Some indicators of conflict drivers collected by the Measuring Progress in Conflict Environments tool support this analysis. However, the situation there remains fragile, and progress in this difficult and desperately poor zone could easily be overwhelmed by broader negative events in Haiti. Cite Soleil shared the increase in food and fuel prices with all parts of Haiti, and will share any further shocks and hardships with the rest of the country as it recovers from the blows of tropical storms Fay, Gustav, Hanna and Ike (Refs B and C). Although we should not forget the success stories we have generated, continued involvement in Cite Soleil by international donors, national partners and GOH institutions will be key to maintaining and expanding the gains that HSI helped foster.

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